agronomist or plant scientist or something and they would give us extra help. As a matter of fact, my first contact with Don Williams was when he was the engineer coming into my area to help on irrigation problems. And these were experts that really helped us. I had good technical advice from the best that the SCS had in every field that you could possibly imagine. I was really privileged to work with people who were experts. Harold Tower was our agronomist. Don Williams was our irrigation specialist.

I had a group of farmers in the new district that I'd helped get into place. It was west of American Falls, in a big flat area. It was about fifty thousand acres that was dry land wheat. This was out in the lava rock country, which was the Mennonite country. One of the board members who ended up being chairman came to me one time and he said, "Do you have a geologist?" and I told him, "Yes, I'll get a man out of Portland." We sat down and talked about the strategy for that area and this geologist went out and looked at it. We actually found a site on this person's farm where the geologist said, "If you poke a hole down here you'll find water." That took a private investment and a chance on this person doing it. He had to convince his dad into doing it. This was a younger man. And they found water. That area turned from a class four area in terms of land capability because of the limitation on precipitation, to a magnificent irrigated area because everybody else went for wells too. They went to sugar beets and potatoes, and much more intensive cropping. Those were the kinds of things that we got called in on. We would kind of hold their hand while they decided, based on the best technical advice that we could give them, what kind of a risk to take. I had some Japanese-Americans that came back from World War II. They were taking over their family operations. They would go through what they should do in the way of an investment and the kinds of things that had to be done to make that farm area look like it does today, magnificent.

**HELMS:** Where were they located?

**BERG:** They were out in the irrigated area north of Pocatello. There are so many things that go back to those days when you start reminiscing about it. The combination of the field and the office work was why most of the SCS-ers came into SCS in the first place.

In 1950, I was asked to take over what I called a work group and become a district conservationist. That gave me the responsibility for the districts in southeastern Idaho. As I said earlier, that included meeting with the district boards and doing all the things you have to do to represent that level of operation in the Service. It turned out to be a very challenging job because you got very well acquainted with all of the people who work in the field and their families and children. You

also tried to represent the things that somebody else wanted, such as the regional office or the state office. We never heard about the Washington

"Who was using the grass?" It was the local livestock people. I said, "Can I meet with them?"

HELMS: Was there a cooperative

**HELMS:** I think that happened a little before the reorganization.

**BERG:** It did, right. Because I remember the people that we used to

**HELMS:** I wanted to back up a moment. What you're saying is that you got the ranchers who were using the land to buy the seed, correct? It was mostly crested wheatgrass?

[redacted]

have here. Ed Grest was the top LU (land utilization) man back here. He came out there to see how I was doing in Idaho. He moved over to the Forest Service in that reorganization. He may have still been here when I came back in 1960, but I'm not real sure.

When the transfer of that land went to the Forest Service, my office was in the Federal Building, the Post Office Building, in Pocatello. Right across the hall was the supervisor of the Caribou National Forest. He had the

**BERG:** Right, crested wheatgrass. There were some other grass strains that began to come in from our plant materials centers that were better. But a lot of it in the early days was crested wheatgrass. Now, there were people who were skeptical about that because they said, "That gives them a right to claim that they have a right to graze." And I said, "Who else is going to come in here?" They were the adjoining ranchers. You were not going to bring ranchers from

[redacted]

a VA (Veterans Administration) loan. It was no easy trick either. There was one time between 1946 and 1950

and I think Van was probably the one that was instrumental in putting the ideas together. First, they had gone to

I had that activity in Idaho. Bolle had was part of that effort, to try to

Idaho instead of six. So we had more districts to be concerned about. And we did not have to meet with the

good friend who I had helped in many ways. He had served in the state legislature and so forth. We got very

was in their sixties, running the outfit. And I said, "Ray, we're the people that are going to have to take this organization over." Well, Ray turned out to be the person who was doing many of the things that had to be done in terms of strategy. He had contacts with people like J. C. Dykes and others who were instrumental in this strategy. That's why the Eisenhower/ Benson group had told Dykes not to go to Capitol Hill for those eight

going to "do in" the whole SCS. But we began to see the strategy develop through what came out, weekly, in that newsletter (the Tuesday Letter) as to the hearings that were being held here and throughout the country and what could be done in lieu of total disbandment. Other New Deal organizations were also threatened-- REA, Farmer's Home. Anything that had come through the New Deal was also reviewed for the first time in the

the dad of the present Senator. I met him and the Senator when he was a boy. There were a few others around the Service that I had contact with and they were encouraging me to look that way, too. I think I applied one year and didn't hear anything. In 1955, I was accepted to go to Harvard. Now, unbeknownst to me, my wife had been tucking a little money away, because we had to do this on our own, there was no government help for that kind of thing. She said, "If you qualify, we'll find a way to make it." At that time we had four children, the youngest being about a year old. And I was accepted at the Littauer Center, was the head of the 4-H activities at that time in Minnesota. Ruth and I had known him, and he had married and had a family. He had been a very outstanding World War II Navy flier. While we were there at Harvard, he was approached by the Minnesota Republican delegation to run for governor. He came to several of us and asked our advice. We suggested that he stay right where he was (laughs)! There was one other SCS-er, Al Mangum, who eventually became the state conservationist in Louisiana. There were people from the Bureau of Reclamation, the USGS (United States Geological Survey),

[redacted]

said, "I would have preferred to stay in Portland! But somebody has to work in other parts of the country." What he had in mind was, South Dakota was having some very tough problems. I didn't know that at the time. I didn't know anything about South Dakota. I'd lived next to it in Minnesota. It was the Dakotas that produced the dust during the Dust Bowl days that drifted over farms in eastern Minnesota. Yet the four years there turned out to be great.

**HELMS:** You went there as the.....

**BERG:** Assistant state conservationist, in charge of the watershed and Great Plains Conservation programs. I was kind of a chief of operations. I don't want this to be misunderstood, but the people that had been scattered around the country from the regional offices really had a morale problem. The people in that area, the Plains, came out of Nebraska. There were several good people that had come out of Nebraska. The state engineer, the other assistant state conservationist, and the state administrative officer, had all been down at the Lincoln, Nebraska, regional office. And that had happened all over the country. It was a matter of fitting those people into a situation that was pretty provincial. These states, with the state conservationists that had been there

how much that really represented. Some of them took it as a very strong mandate to do almost anything they wanted and there was concern that we'd end up with a national Service or end up with fifty programs instead of seven. It was obvious, because South Dakota was Don Williams' home state. He was born in a little town called Doland and had gone through South Dakota State University at Brookings. Don and I had about ten years of history. All that left me no choice but to take that assignment. I said, "Well, we have got to go back and sell the home in Idaho and move the family in time for school in Huron." So we did that. That turned out to be a totally new experience, because the Great Plains are different from the Midwest and different from the West. Huron was the northern part of the Dust Bowl during the 1930s. But again, a great group of professionals were there with the Soil Conservation Service, and a great group of district leaders and farmers.

**HELMS:** You mentioned the coordinators. They didn't really have direct supervisory authority over the field offices, did they?

**BERG:** In the beginning they did not. They eventually became state conservationists but still with limited staff. About all the staff they had at

engineering, agronomy, biology and everything you needed. But the states approached this job in a variety of ways depending on the leadership that

It developed into a nation-wide battle just like the reorganization. It called for hearings and people got into the act, including the Secretary. The help

responsibilities were as local district governing board members." Tony Krebs was on the national board; he was from Wall and a big rancher. Howard Gears was the state agency representative, and I represented SCS as kind of a background person. We would travel day and night to the districts that were threatened with these petitions and explain to them what they were, what their responsibilities were, and what could happen if they lost their district.

The second district that petitioned and came up for a vote was out at Mitchell, the hometown of the state association president. He was a dairy farmer and a good one, a younger farmer. We held that to a tie. And then there was one other one, and we won that one. We only lost one district. And then, based on legal advice, probably including the help that Phil Glick gave, the state attorney general said, "To go through this process is a waste of public money." And they threw the rest of the petitions out. And that was the end of it. By that time, the national level had gotten its act together, the assignment for Great Plains had been solidified in SCS, and the Secretary had gotten into the act to write what had to be done in cooperative arrangements between ASCS and SCS.

**BERG:** Right after. It hit us like a brick wall, because we didn't understand all the ramifications of why that had happened back here, like I do now. It was an assistant secretary out of Oregon, Ervin L. Peterson, who had insisted that the SCS have this assignment. Of course, Don Williams was not in favor in ASCS. He had been at ACP (Agricultural Conservation Program) for a while, when it was an independent agency. He had actually gone to the Hill and testified that they didn't need as much money as they were getting. They were spending money on lime and things like that. That upset the bureaucracy. When he became the administrator of SCS and got the Great Plains assignment on top of that, that was more than the old bureaucracy could stand over there in the ASCS.

**HELMS:** The National Limestone Institute was involved in that effort?

**BERG:** Expert at lobbying.

**HELMS:** I've seen their newsletter.

**BERG:** There's a file some place that just has to be very fascinating on this whole area. I had gone through the process of helping to get districts established in Idaho and had acted in the background. I understood how

established and how important it was to defeat attempts to get districts

South Dakota in the first place was because we had a morale problem

## Part Two: January 28, 1993

This interview was conducted at the offices of the American Farmland Trust in Washington, D.C.

**HELMS:** At our first interview, we ended just as you were about to take a job in Washington. Please explain to us your duties, as well as any important topics and events.

**BERG:** The administrator at that time, Don Williams, reassigned me from South Dakota to the Washington, D.C. headquarters of the Soil Conservation Service and I reported in December of 1960. The job that he had in mind for me to do was to replace two people. One had been his confidential assistant, Glenn Rule, who had worked with Don and

priority on my part because although I knew the Midwest, the Great Plains and the West very well, I had limited experience in the other regions of the country including the Southwest, the South and the Northeast.

**HELMS:** What did the job of confidential assistant involve? I don't know that we use that term anymore.

**BERG:** Glenn Rule, when he occupied that position, was obviously an advisor in many ways and was also a good writer. So he did a lot of the writing for the chief's talks and that sort of thing. Now it would be more related to perhaps a political assignment. At that time, it was not. Neither Rule nor Abbot were political appointees from the standpoint of the administration, but they were very close to many of the things that were

inner city out into the suburbs. Also the metropolitan areas became much larger with the growth of our U.S. population. But the soil and water conservation problems remained on the land regardless of the ownership. So the Soil Conservation Service in many of the conservation districts that were experiencing heavy population growth had some very challenging assignments that went beyond what I had had in the way of background working primarily with the farmers and ranchers in Idaho and in South Dakota. That led us to re-analyze the types of technical assistance that we had, not only at the national level, but also in the state offices, that would fit the local conditions in these rapidly urbanizing districts where there was still an important workload in the agricultural area, but also an established a district outlook committee of members of their own association and state agencies, and asked the administrator to assign SCS people as advisors. I was the leader of a five-person team in that effort.

**HELMS:** This is about when?

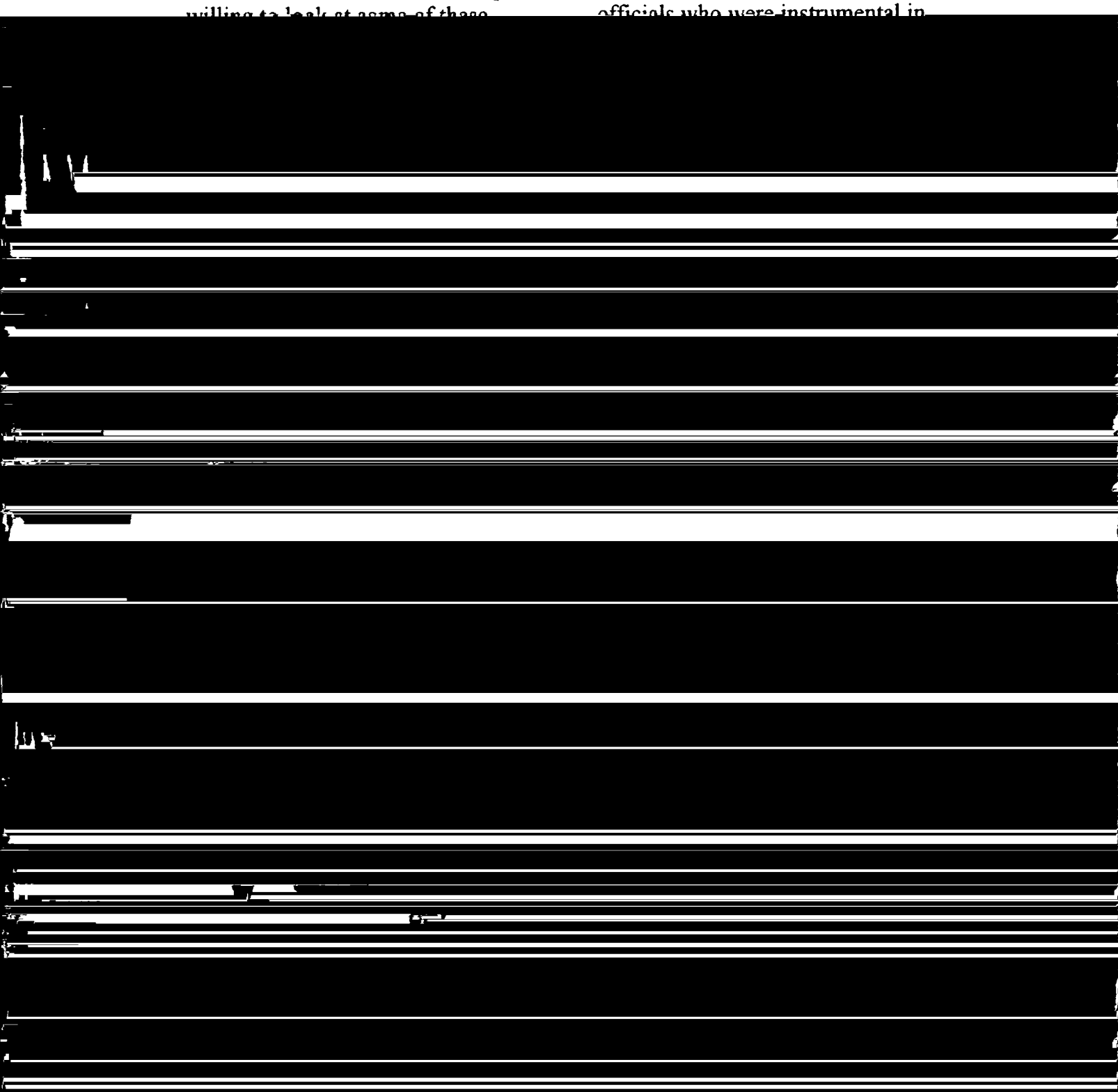
**BERG:** That was in the early 1960s. That led to an analysis of what had been the experience of conservation districts for the first twenty-five years of their work and what still needed to be done. This led to additional authority for the conservation districts to deal with some of these problems that went beyond just the farm and ranch and agricultural sector. We also recognized that there were new opportunities, especially the work related to the small watersheds, the

**HELMS:** The Orville Freeman administration also had an emphasis on helping urbanizing areas. This emphasis had started somewhat before the beginning of that administration, correct?

**BERG:** The Freeman leadership was willing to look at some of these

and Milwaukee, where we had been engaged in a variety of activities that went beyond soil conservation on farmland.

**HELMS:** I guess to avoid the implication that everything is made in Washington, there were some city officials who were instrumental in



growth management. In those days, in Maryland for example, some of the suburban counties, like Montgomery County and Prince Georges County around Washington, D.C., Baltimore County around Baltimore, Maryland, and Fairfax County in Virginia began developing local ordinances or authorities to deal with this problem. In Maryland that eventually led to an

picture. We developed for the first time, and I think it was a breakthrough, a policy for the Department on how land use could be analyzed, and a policy for land use. I can remember Secretary of Agriculture Earl Butz asking me to chair a committee that led to a land use policy statement.

HELMS: What generally were the

the national level when Cy Lucker, who had helped start that program, retired. In effect I had taken on three positions and combined them into one. When I went on to become the deputy administrator it was required that I have an assistant for the Great Plains Conservation Program area, which we did have, and then we had a special area that dealt with congressional relations. But my background in that

a national land use policy through Congress. It did not happen, but agriculture had a very keen interest in what that would have been. The Soil and Water Conservation Society at that time was very forward in leading the debate on what should be done and they had two major conferences, one in Des Moines, Iowa, and one in Omaha, Nebraska. We brought

that we established a committee of state conservationists led by the state conservationist in Texas, Red Smith, to look at what should be done for the future of the Great Plains Conservation Program. There had always been a discussion about how large that area should be. The law required that it be confined to the ten Great Plains states, but we had drawn a boundary line on the east side that was in quite a curve

to do some of the work on the bigger ranches. One of the committees in Congress that handled this was the committee on agriculture on the House side. Congressman Bob Poage chaired the committee at that time and he took an interest in the program because he was from Texas. Another congressman who was a very influential person, George Mahon from Texas, endorsed the program

interview, he wanted me to come to work on his staff in Washington, but Don Williams sent me to South Dakota. I stayed in touch with Carl then. When I came back to Washington, we developed an even closer working relationship. He had the long-term background of how that program had come from the early days on the authorized river basin watershed activity, and our work with the Corps of Engineers, the Department of the Interior and other departments at the national level. He was able to educate me and keep me very well informed about the work of the Small Watershed Program. He unfortunately died at an early age, and I still feel keenly the loss of a person like that.

**HELMS:** Of course, we know Charles Kellogg was a prolific writer. What was his influence within the Soil Conservation Service and his contribution there?

[redacted]

close working relationship with the Forest Service and through him I had a chance to get acquainted with the chief of the Forest Service, at that time Richard McArdle, and after that with the other chiefs.

**HELMS:** The RC&Ds have had a fair amount of political support. Over the past thirty years there has been a sort of up and down level of support by various administrations for them.

**BERG:** The RC&Ds came from an interesting background. I went to Capitol Hill to testify along with Secretary Freeman on something he was concerned about. He came to Washington and looked out the window from the South Building at that large expanse of area south and east that had been totally cleared of very low level housing. As he looked out that window, he made the remark, "Why don't we have something like that for rural areas? If we have an urban renewal program, why shouldn't

economy you need to understand that

some resistance by the people in

making it very difficult to get any additional assistance based on these new responsibilities.

We had people who had reached the conclusion that, since the dust bowls and gullies that had developed around the country during the first two hundred years of our development couldn't be seen because they were covered up with trees, therefore the problems of soil conservation had been solved. That led us to a couple of things that we felt were desirable. Our data had to be improved. That came from an early authority to do more soil surveys and what we ended up calling the National Resources Inventory work. That allowed us to

**HELMS:** While we're on that track let's go ahead and deal with that. What constituency pushed some of these ideas?

**BERG:** It was more an urban-based constituency that had that view. We were rapidly becoming an urban nation. That representation was beginning to show up in Congress, in key committees in Congress and in state legislatures in these highly urbanized states. They were getting pressure for other higher priority activities because the environmental movement was getting underway in the early 1970s. After the first Earth Day, many of what we call now the quality of life issues were more

problems were plaguing the nation in very critical areas that needed to be addressed.

on their concerns about water quality. We were also concerned about the role of the public lands, Forest Service

approach instead of regulation. We also had an alternative that eventually led to the conservation compliance work that came from the 1985 farm bill, although at that time it did not get much support.

**HELMS:** You were chief when the administrations changed and before the first national program was announced. As I recall, there was a lot of debate and decisions to be made before we finally got a national program out. What are your recollections on that and what were the points at issue?

**BERG:** It was kind of interesting. When you look back at the first run that came out of the late 1970s on RCA, the world needed more food and fiber and there was an all-out push for production. But by the time the new administration arrived and Block became Secretary of Agriculture, the problem was already being turned around. Although we had forecast export needs at a level that built on a pretty healthy background and some other things that related to population growth, we found shortly after the new administration began in the 1980s that surpluses from the standpoint of crop production began to build up again. That required not only trying to hold the line on exports, which were dropping off, but also determining what kind of land use should dominate in the future. In other words, the land use allocation process came back heavily and we discerned that we did not need these highly erodible lands in the production system. The early run on RCA was concerned primarily with the on-site productivity of soil. In other words, what would be the impact of soil loss on the individual farm's productive capability? We were concerned about holding that production capability at a high level. But by the time we got around to releasing the first national conservation plan, the emphasis was already shifting to off-site problems dealing with water quality, what was happening to wildlife habitat as wetlands were being moved into agricultural uses, and what was happening to other activities that the public was more concerned with than just soil loss affecting production on a farm.

**HELMS:** The RCA involves long-range planning. I was wondering, during Ken Grant's administration, how did SCS develop this framework plan, Soil and Water Conservation for a Better America? Did that have much impact? How did that come about and what are your thoughts on it?

**BERG:** I meant to mention that. As a matter of fact that was a very forward, pioneering effort that we undertook in the beginning of 1969 when Ken Grant moved in to be the administrator and I became his associate. That framework plan, if you look back on it, covered many of the items that are still on the agenda for the Soil Conservation Service. We went through a very deliberate process to expand the

activities. It related in part to the activities I mentioned earlier of the district outlook committee examining the first twenty-five years of conservation districts. As they enlarged their responsibilities and even changed some of their state laws to broaden their authorities, that challenged the Soil Conservation Service to look at what they should be doing in cooperation with the conservation districts and other organizations to move beyond traditional soil erosion reduction,

laws in a way that is not limited by somebody having to sanction what you can say or not say.

**HELMS:** Let me drop back to the 1960s. Of course you were there when the Civil Rights Act was passed and I have written one article on how SCS tried to deal with that. For this interview could you recount for us the agency's reaction and how it tried to deal with meeting the spirit of the law in terms of equal employment and

Now within the agency, the development of technical staff that included more minorities was a real challenge. One of the early leaders on this was Ralph Sasser, who was the state conservationist in Tennessee. We worked to strengthen the curriculum in the 1890 Land Grant Universities that would produce qualified people whom the Soil Conservation Service would be able to put on full-time. We also found a lack of women in the Soil Conservation Service. I personally brought several into key positions. The universities began producing very highly qualified women who were able to be soil scientists, soil conservationists, biologists, or economists that the Service found to be very capable.

I have one last thought on that. I think the Service and other USDA agencies

**HELMS:** Who would propose this, the Civil Rights Commission or the OMB?

**BERG:** Primarily, the people who had responsibility for equal employment opportunity, the civil service and the rights of the minorities.

**HELMS:** You did try to get the state conservationists to encourage minority candidates to run, but with very limited success. I know a few were elected but not very many.

**BERG:** In terms of governing board members?

**HELMS:** Yes.

**BERG:** It's been an uphill struggle to

of the initiatives that needed to be developed, related primarily to the broader concerns of the environmental community, but especially water quality. I had been assigned in 1972 to lead a team from the United States and each of the eight states that bordered the Great Lakes along with a Canadian team under the sponsorship of the International Joint Commission,

carried fertilizers and chemicals that hadn't been utilized by the plants. These were causing some severe problems in terms of water quality, especially in Lake Erie. Our recommendations led to more attention being given to the nonpoint sources of pollution because up to that time, point sources had gotten most of the funding from the federal level. It

**BERG:** Yes, we were doing this work far beyond the Great Lakes area. Much of the work we did in the Great Lakes area was driven by what we were seeing happen in other parts of the country too.

**HELMS:** Your assignment on this and Grant going to the Secretary--were those two tied together?

**BERG:** Yes, I think there is a

**HELMS:** That was the program SCS would like to have run but the funding never came and internal debate over the leadership occurred, correct?

**BERG:** There's a document that assigned the total program in terms of jurisdiction to the Soil Conservation Service, but eventually that developed into a discussion as to the role of the Agricultural Stabilization and Conservation Service, their key role in

water quality? So the finger pointing was one of the concerns they had. Admission eventually came that they probably were part of the problem and that they would like to be part of the plan to correct it. We especially ran into that around the Chesapeake Bay where we've had very good leadership. The whole nonpoint water quality

The channel work of the Soil Conservation Service needed review. That began shortly after the Carter Administration came in because President Carter, as governor of Georgia, had been exposed to some of the problems regarding the Small Watershed Program. We had several cases that had ended up in court. Tom

not have to be very severe--cutting down through the floodplain in a straight line. We could leave some of the meandering, we could leave some

to do some replanning on the projects that needed modification.

**HELMS:** I don't know if this

heritage of dealing with things like the Small Watershed Program which recognizes these watershed boundaries. We have the other side of

**BERG:** My opinion of Don Williams is so high. I think he was the one administrator in the Soil Conservation Service who stands out in my memory

**HELMS:** A pretty ringing endorsement. So we mentioned in 1965 you became the deputy for field services, right?

**BERG:** Yes.

**HELMS:** I suppose when Don Williams retired you would have been one of those under consideration? Was not getting the chief's job a big disappointment to you?

**BERG:** No, not really. I'm reminded that Secretary Freeman asked, and he may have asked more people than I know about, to write what they viewed the chief's position, at that time called administrator, to represent, and what would be the challenges that should be faced. This was when the job of associate administrator was open. I wrote a several page paper regarding my views of the opportunities and challenges that would be faced in that position. I know that Ken Grant was asked to do the same thing and perhaps some others. But the result was that Ken Grant was selected to be the associate administrator and then became the administrator. I was fortunate enough to become his associate.

**HELMS:** What was his emphasis? Do you recall his views on the challenges and the emphasis of his administration?

**BERG:** Our views were highly compatible. He had come from the state conservationist position in New Hampshire, had had the year at Harvard, had been the state conservationist in Indiana, and had been brought in as the associate to Don Williams. He and I found that we were very compatible in terms of what should be done. That led to that earlier reference that you talked about, that Framework Plan for Soil and Water Conservation Work. As I mentioned earlier, he was the one that went to the Secretary about the need to have USDA more heavily involved in water quality activity. He recognized that and was heavily impacted by the debate about how the watershed program should be carried out, especially the channel work. We had to make adjustments in that area that were very healthy. We began a program at the University of Georgia under the leadership of people like Gene Odum and others, training our top level people to be environmentally sensitive if they hadn't had that kind of background.

**HELMS:** Since you mentioned that topic, the beginning of the "environmental period" was a shock to some people, was that right?

**BERG:** It was a shock because many people in the traditional agricultural area read Rachel Carson's *Silent Spring* as being far out and not acceptable. They failed to read the significance of that very important book and her findings as to what was happening to our total environment and ecosystems. She understood that perhaps better than any other person

I need to amplify a little bit on that. There were people that really resented the fact that agriculture was being labeled as part of the problem when we thought we had done a magnificent job of producing increased yields of food and fiber every year and had adopted the technology that had come out of the research in the scientific community and moved on to new technologies. We were quite surprised by the reaction; namely that some of these activities were viewed with dismay by the environmentalists that were getting a handle on much broader issues than what we were prepared to deal with.

**HELMS:** There was one incident that happened in the 1970s which I want to ask your recollection of. When the Soil Conservation Service started in the Department of the Interior, it had had some big projects on Indian reservations, particularly the Navajo reservation. Then the president's reorganization plan in the early 1940s said that the Department of the Interior would do the conservation work. But in the late 1970s we re-introduced SCS by establishing a policy that reservations could establish conservation districts. Could you give your recollection on how that came about?

Department of the Interior people to work on those kinds of problems. So we went after that very vigorously and had support.

**HELMS:** Maybe this was Freeman's influence. Did not the Soil Conservation Service get more involved in foreign assignments? Was that the 1960s? Someone I think told me that part of the problem previously was there was no mechanism for assuring people they would retain their civil service rights when they returned or even have a job. Could you straighten this out for me?

**BERG:** Freeman was very concerned about international activities. He had traveled widely. Les Brown was one of his early staff people in this area, obviously a very talented person who has gone on to have a worldwide reputation in his own right in the World Watch activities. We did have a strengthening of our international work and this, plus the concern of our administrator Williams, caused it to happen.

**HELMS:** Could you sort of review during your tenure, some views of the various assistant secretaries you've reported to and what their emphasis for Soil Conservation Service was?

done came from his leadership. Secretary Bob Long was an excellent leader, no question about that. He understood the issues that dealt with not only the traditional work, but also the concern about prime farmlands. He helped get the land use policy through the Department that we talked about earlier, which led to some conferences on land use, and laid the groundwork for what eventually became the National Agricultural Land Study, as well as the organization whose offices we are sitting in here, the American Farmland Trust. There have been other assistant secretaries since I left the Soil Conservation Service, including the most recent one, whom I have a lot of respect for. That's Jim Moseley. He just served a couple of years but his leadership led to some of the continuing work the Soil Conservation Service still faces. These people come back in my memory as very outstanding leaders.

**HELMS:** How did you come to be chief? Why were you selected?

**HELMS:** What did you want to accomplish? What were your priorities?

**BERG:** We were right in the midst of the very demanding exercise that I mentioned earlier, the Resource Conservation Act appraisal, a national activity to strengthen our partnership with the states. I had about a ten-point agenda in mind. First of all, in terms of management, strengthen our field activities to build our field forces whenever we had an opportunity. That included not only the federal appropriations but strengthening the nonfederal help coming from state and local governments. That had been increasing over the years but was fairly fragmented and needed to be strengthened. We had to recognize the interdisciplinary activities that involved the Soil Conservation Service, giving high priority to bringing in every possible expert to deal with the problems that cut across many different disciplines, and to not have the area dominated by any one discipline, whether it be a soil

I was also concerned that the Soil Conservation Service should be recognized as a highly professional organization, a lead organization in cooperation with the conservation districts at the state and local level. We really should be the conscience of the federal government in regard to

finance, and other operations. But, we didn't have that at the national level. I established that under the leadership of Pearlie Reed, who is now [in early 1993] the state conservationist in California. That was really a management need. We needed to get our own headquarters operation

ship of the Soil and Water Conservation Society, I see that these organizations are highly compatible

that would do a more comprehensive job of taking on these added responsibilities. It would reduce some

## Part Three: May 4, 1993

**HELMS:** As we start out, Norm, could you reiterate your

procurement, funding of travel, and office space problems and the day-by-day business-type operations headquarters has to worry about. We had several hundred people in our national

effect, we gave them line authority at that time. It was stated so that everybody in the field knew that. There were some other activities that came from our study and realignment which required approval by the Secretary of Agriculture. The reorganization of agencies has to go through a fairly detailed process. It also was related to the proper use of the executive service idea that had

**HELMS:** Could you explain how SCS's work group and Congressman Whitten worked on conservation and watershed programs? What about the early period when there were disagreements with him?

**BERG:** One of the earlier experiences when I joined the headquarters staff in the early 1960s was to accompany the administrator

**HELMS:** Norm, I thought Clifford Hope and William Poage were more important in the start of P.L. 566.

**BERG:** Whitten was the grandfather of the Small Watershed Program, starting it with pilot activities in an appropriation bill that eventually led to the action by Congress that passed the Public Law 566. He protected that area because he had one of the early river basin authorizations that dealt with flood prevention. He wanted to expand that activity nationwide through the Small Watershed

**HELMS:** This is about what time?

**BERG:** That goes back more than twenty-five years as I remember. We also found in working with Mr. Whitten that any new activity that was going to be proposed that required funding, such as the early efforts to get involved in nonpoint source pollution that eventually became the Rural Clean Water Program, started on a very limited pilot basis. He was always concerned that we not introduce something new at the expense of traditional programs. That

**HELMS:** He was not in favor of a lot of the requirements and restrictions in the environmental laws, correct?

**BERG:** After the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) was created during the Nixon era, his committee had the jurisdiction over its appropriations. He found that it really didn't fit with his views of what should be funded and how they should operate. It eventually went to another committee. For anything new that dealt with moving away from the productive capability of agriculture or that might be viewed as a restriction from the environmental standpoint

**HELMS:** Can you recount the background to the delay in releasing the RCA? The Reagan administration had to become familiar with it and it took a little while to finally get out. For them, I guess, the point was the influence they wanted to have on the final national program.

**BERG:** The RCA had gone through a very lengthy process of getting public comment back on several alternatives. Some of these alternatives were fairly far reaching and they finally showed up in the 1985 farm bill, but they weren't about to be endorsed without further study by the incoming

to give the Department the latitude to mandate additional resources. Anything that was going to be done was going to be at the expense of something else. Early in the appropriation effort, we were able to get an effort to rededicate about five percent of the cost share funding with additional technical assistance to some targeted areas. That was very beneficial and was the beginning of the process that led to some of the initiatives that we ended up with in the 1985 farm bill.

**HELMS:** You, of course, were our last career chief in SCS. Why were you asked to retire from that position and what were your feelings and reactions at the time?

**BERG:** I don't know just exactly how

Oregon. He was primarily in the business of trying to get more timber harvested from the national forests. Incidentally, his confirmation process in the Senate was very long and drawn out. There was really a battle about that. There were three people that kind of fit the pattern at that time: the administrator of EPA, the Secretary of the Interior, James Watt, and John Crowell were all viewed by the environmentalists as being very much against the kind of things that they felt should be done. But John Crowell was a good friend and he had advised the Secretary not to make a change but asked that I keep this quiet. He was going off on a trip and suggested that we not do anything about this until he came back. In another couple of weeks, the news people began to pick up that something was developing.

from Congress, but in the end, the Secretary prevailed and brought in Peter Myers. I decided after nearly forty years of service that I would leave on the second of April 1982.

I did not agree with that decision. I was asked to step down when Secretary Block decided to bring his

It's kind of interesting when I look back on whether or not the Soil Conservation Service should be headed by a career person or a politically appointed person. If the political appointment would have resulted in more resources coming to the Soil Conservation Service because they would have had more influence

**BERG:** I was one of the people at the beginning of the American Farmland Trust, which was building primarily on the National Agricultural Lands Study that we have been a part of. I was one of their early counselors, working with Pat Noonan and Doug Wheeler. Of course, Bob Gray was one of the first people to join the American Farmland Trust and he had headed our National Agricultural Lands Study. When I had announced that I was leaving, Doug Wheeler and Bob Gray asked that I give consideration to becoming a part-time senior advisor for the American Farmland Trust at a time of my choosing. I took a couple of weeks off to think about it and decided that it was good way of rounding out my career. It's been eleven years now and it's been a very healthy and fruitful relationship.

**HELMS:** Should we talk about the events leading up to the passage of the 1985 farm bill, the agricultural climate that allowed it to be passed, the working groups that you were involved in, and some of those issues?

**BERG:** This comes back to my joining the American Farmland Trust. One of the reasons that they asked me was that president Doug Wheeler and his chief associate Bob Gray had just begun, with the approval of the Board of Directors of the American Farm-

work, we were able to get some added evidence as to how the farmers viewed what should be done. We set up an advisory committee of key people representing a mix of farmers, government officials, commodity groups, bankers and so forth. From that came a study that ended up having a series of recommendations as to what should be done. Ken Cook was involved in the writing of the report. We contracted with about twenty people who developed technical papers. That included key people on many of the issues that related to farm bill activity.

I had also been asked in the beginning of 1983 to be the Washington representative for the Soil and Water Conservation Society. We were able to bring that organization into the circle of discussions along with the American Farmland Trust and about a dozen of the conservation and environmental organizations. These included the older organizations such as the National Association of Conservation Districts, the Society of Range Management, the Society of American Foresters, the American Forestry Association, the National Wildlife Federation, the Wildlife Institute, the Audubon and Sierra organizations, and the Izaak Walton League. There were several of these organizations that found a particular

[redacted]

terms of protecting valuable wetlands and it led to the conservation compliance activity. That was really a surprising initiative on the part of many people. It was a very strong initiative that even today is probably the most demanding provision that came from the 1985 farm bill.

**HELMS:** How was the lobbying done to get the congressional support?

**BERG:** We developed several background papers on each of these issues. As an example, the Sierra Club put together an excellent set of documents that could be utilized in their lobbying capability. It was really just excellent. Each of these groups had key people to follow each of these activities, and special assignments were given to the organizations that had contact with certain congressmen, senators or key staff. The key to much of the work was very close cooperation with people in important positions in agencies. We needed the help because the details, in terms of data and how the programs could be implemented, had to be practical and done in a way that they were able to

Governor Evans of Idaho. After that excellent hearing, it's my understanding that Senator Lugar directed his staff to begin working on a legislative package that would eventually become the conservation provisions of the Senate bill. Comparable work was going on in the House side under the leadership of Congressman Jones, who was the Chairman of the Subcommittee for Conservation Credit and Rural Development. Their efforts, combined with the actions by the Senate committee, eventually resulted in a bill that was widely circulated. We got excellent support not only from the organizations that represented the coalition, but also from the key people in federal and state governments. We had a really solid base because the 1981 farm bill was viewed as out-of-date. It was very timely that this activity was put in place.

**HELMS:** Let's just mention at least briefly some of the major issues on implementation. The first was how restricted the requirements would be for the CRP (Conservation Reserve

erodible cropland areas. The argument about what to accept in the way of a T-value. We had in mind locking up the most erodible land first. There were several modifications of policy. As we review the 36.5 million acres that are in the CRP and look to the future, what happens to that land after the ten-year contract time? There is obviously land in the conservation reserve that we do not need to protect with public money. We need to sort out those most sensitive areas that should really have a long-term less intensive use.

**HELMS:** The other thing that happened during this period was the discussion of alternative conservation systems. Could you lay that discussion out for us, as well as your view and the conservation coalition's view on it?

**BERG:** There were some excellent oversight hearings on what should be done about compliance. The SCS did a remarkable job of developing well over a million compliance plans on over 135 million acres. There was in the Congress a discussion about how tight these plans should be in terms of

dations for that, just go to the most

groups in the country that said they

questions about the residue level that is expected and whether it can be met in a practical way. The 1993 and

**HELMS:** The Soil and Water Conservation Society got involved in monitoring and appraising programs;

1985 farm bill. Was there ever a concern that there would be a reversal on some of the provisions in the 1985 bill?

**BERG:** Yes, Doug, there was concern. It ended up that the 1990 farm bill strengthened all provisions of the 1985 Act and added some additional features, especially as they would relate to off-site impacts that might damage water quality, as well as the expanded conservation reserve. They made some very clear-cut policy determinations that what was done in 1985 should be not only continued, but should also be taken very seriously. It was evident during the debate on the 1990 farm bill that many others, including the commodity groups and farm organizations, had very carefully evaluated what had happened in 1985 and were now part of the process of helping move on through the 1990 farm bill. They had to contend with a very strong element of pressure from the environmental community that provisions from the 1985 farm bill remain solid, be taken seriously and be monitored.

**HELMS:** As we sit here in May, there are some proposals for a Farm Services Agency which would merge the Soil Conservation Service, ASCS, and the Extension Service.

**HELMS:** But going back to that point, I wanted to ask you a two-part question. One, as a young person in the field, can you recall what was done in 1953 during plans for merger? Two, could you recount for us in 1985 the proposals to zero out the funding? What have the conservation groups, NACD, the Soil and Water Conservation Society, and others done in previous incidents?

**BERG:** In the effort to examine all of the so-called New Deal programs when the Eisenhower/Benson administration took office, there was a determined effort to examine agencies such as ASCS, Farmer's Home, REA (Rural Electrification Administration), and Federal Crop Insurance to decide whether they should be continued. A determination was made at some level in the Secretary's office that SCS was no longer needed. The districts had excellent leadership from a rancher in Texas, Waters Davis. He was alerted to this plan to eliminate the SCS or at least reduce its capability considerably. As I mentioned in our previous interview, that led to what became the Tuesday Letter that went to each of the conservation districts in the country. There were hearings in the field, and in Congress there was a great deal of concern about eliminating SCS. The result was that SCS had to give up its seven regional

I talked earlier in this interview about [redacted] gations include not only districts but

**BERG:** Doug, I've been privileged to have this long association with the soil and water conservation movement for anything that could be described as being in the field of conservation or the environment. My association with

[redacted]

# Appendix One:

# Frequently Used Acronyms

| | |
|---|---|
| AAA | Agricultural Adjustment Administration |
| ACP | Agricultural Conservation Program |
| AID | Agency for International Development |
| ARS | Agricultural Research Service |
| ASCS | Agricultural Stabilization and Conservation Service |
| BLM | Bureau of Land Management |
| CCC | Civilian Conservation Corps |
| CRP | Conservation Reserve Program |
| DC | District Conservationist |
| EEO | Equal Employment Opportunity |
| EPA | Environmental Protection Agency |
| FmHA | Farmers Home Administration |
| FSA | Food Security Act |
| GAO | Government Accounting Office |
| HUD | Department of Housing and Urban Development |
| NACD | National Association of Conservation Districts |
| NEPA | National Environmental Policy Act |
| NRI | National Resources Inventory |
| NTC | National Technical Center |
| OMB | Office of Management and Budget |
| OPM | Office of Personnel Management |
| RAMP | Rural Abandoned Mine Program |
| RCA | Resource Conservation Act |
| RC&D | Resource Conservation and Development |
| REA | Rural Electrification Administration |
| RFF | Resources for the Future |
| ROTC | Reserve Officers Training Corps |
| RPA | Resources Planning Act |
| SCD | Soil Conservation District |
| SCS | Soil Conservation Service |
| SES | Soil Erosion Service |
| TSC | Technical Services Center |

| | |
|---|---|
| USDA | United States Department of Agriculture |
| VA | Veterans Administration |
| WPA | Works Progress Administration |

# Appendix Two:

# Chiefs and Adminstrators of the Soil Conservation Service

**Chief**

| | |
|---|---|
| Hugh Hammond Bennett | September 19, 1933 to November 13, 1951 |
| Robert M. Salter | November 13, 1951 to November 2, 1953 |

**Administrator**

| | |
|---|---|
| Donald A. Williams | November 27, 1953 to January 11, 1969 |
| Kenneth E. Grant | January 12, 1969 to May 31, 1975 |
| R. M. (Mel) Davis | June 1, 1975 to September 11, 1979 |

**Chief**

| | |
|---|---|
| Norman A. Berg | September 12, 1979 to April 2, 1982 |
| Peter C. Myers | April 4, 1982 to March 20, 1985 |
| Wilson Scaling | May 21, 1985 to July 11, 1990 |
| William J. Richards | December 16, 1990 to January 22, 1993 |
| Paul W. Johnson | January 10, 1994 to present |